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WHAT IS MARRIAGE COUNSELING?

BY DAVID R. MACE

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WHAT IS MARRIAGE COUNSELING?

BY DAVID R. MACE

Dr. Mace has done marriage counseling for over twenty years. He founded the marriage counseling services in his native Britain. In 1949 he came to the U.S.A., where he is Professor of Human Relations at Drew University in New Jersey. A member of the American Association of Marriage Counselors, he is also Chairman of the International Commission on Marriage Guidance, which has its headquarters in Paris. . . . This pamphlet is illustrated by Anna Marie Magagna.

AS SHE left the Divorce Court, Anne's thoughts were in a tumult. It was all over, she said to herself. Her marriage was finished. All the dreams she and Ted had dreamed, all the plans they had made — all broken, shattered. It seemed like a funeral.

The future was going to be hard. She would be lonely. Ted would now marry Frances. Would they be happy? A wave of bitterness surged within her, and tears began to flow. Why did this have to happen to her? Couldn't something have been done? When she found out about Ted and Frances, had she acted right? Her friends had advised her to go to the lawyer. But wasn't there somewhere else she could have gone?

A funeral. Yes, it was like that. The lawyer was the mortician. The Divorce Court was the place where they wrote the death certificate. A dead marriage, like a dead body, had to be properly buried.

"But my marriage *wasn't* dead when I went to the lawyer," Anne protested to herself. "It was sick, but not dead. What I wanted was a marriage doctor — not a mortician."

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What happened to Anne is likely to happen to at least one in every six Americans who live out an average life-span. We have become so accustomed to living with high divorce rates that in the welter of figures we no longer feel the heart-throb of personal anguish and disillusionment that accompanies every broken marriage. "Just one of those things," we say.

But some people have been asking the question that emerged from the tumult of Anne's emotions. *Must* all these millions of marriages fail? Isn't there *something* that can be done to save at least a few of them? Does it make sense to have mortuaries for dead marriages, but no hospitals for sick marriages?

The answer is beginning to come. Sooner or later, people find a way to meet every deep and widespread human need. As long as twenty-five years ago, the first attempts were made to offer organized help in marriage problems. But new ideas catch on slowly, and it has only been during very recent years that the concept of marriage counseling has been given serious attention.

Most people still have a very confused idea of what it is all about. The purpose of this pamphlet is to make the picture as clear as possible.

new expectations in marriage

It is natural that we should think of the marriage counselor as a salvage officer. Although all divorces are not unrelieved tragedies, the break-up of a home is justifiably thought of as a disaster. Every new divorce represents the crumbling of another unit of human society. Anything we can do to prevent that is worth while.

We shall not get a clear or accurate picture of marriage counseling, however, if we think of it primarily as a service to pick up the matrimonial wrecks and get them back on the highway. This represents a negative way of looking at the task of the counselor. There is in fact a much more positive reason why his services are increasingly in demand today.

When our great-grandparents married, they hoped they would be happy together. But if they weren't, there was little they could do about it. On their wedding day a door closed behind them and the bolt was shot home. Happy or unhappy, they made the best of it. Marriage involved duties — social, civic, religious. Like a soldier, you did your duty regardless of how you felt about it. Any happiness that came your way was a bonus.

Some people wish marriage had stayed that way. But we have to deal with realities, not wishes. And the reality is that today people are asking a good deal of marriage. It is expected to bring in a high yield in terms of personal fulfillment. Marriage is for love, and love means happiness. We've got to be happy in marriage, or else. . . . That's the modern philosophy.

It has a bad side, yes. It makes many people superficial. Expectations are often pitched unreasonably high. The pursuit of pleasure for its own sake leads nowhere. All quite true.

On the other hand, there are good reasons why people should expect marriage to bring happiness. Close relationships function at their best only when the experience is a satisfying one.

Harmony and contentment are the very heart of good family life.

The increasing modern demand for happiness in marriage has stimulated a good deal of study and research. We still have a lot to learn about the complexities of the marriage relationship, but we have been gathering an impressive amount of new knowledge in recent years. Probably more books have been written on marriage in the last fifty years than in the previous five hundred.

So when Tom and Nancy get married today they are aiming high. They have a picture of the ideal marriage in their minds that comes from what they have read in books and magazine articles, what they have heard and seen on radio and TV programs, even what they have learned in high school and college courses. If they are well-informed, that picture will represent a quality of relationship that they can reasonably hope to achieve — good sex adjustment, good emotional adjustment, good comradeship and cooperation, good teamwork in raising their children. On such foundations, happy and healthy families are built.

wanted - a marriage doctor

Tom and Nancy may be fortunate enough to achieve their goals by their own unaided efforts. But it's just as likely that they won't. So one day they take a good look at their marriage and see that it doesn't measure up to their expectations. It hasn't worked out quite in the way they read about in the books and learned about in the courses. Something has gone wrong.

What can they do about it? Nancy and Tom aren't thinking about divorce. On the whole, married life has been good. But not so good as they believe it could have been. Measured against the standards they have set up for themselves, it hasn't quite made the grade. So they want help.

The help they need could be of many kinds. Some couples run into trouble in their sex life. Nancy may feel that Tom's demands are unreasonable. Tom may worry because Nancy has difficulty in achieving a full response to his love-making, and as a result is losing interest.

Or it may be that they are having more and more quarrels. They become irritated and resentful in situations where they ought to be able to agree and cooperate — the handling of their money, the distribution of work and responsibility in the home, the raising of the children. Tom may feel that Nancy is nagging him, or Nancy may be worried because Tom often seems shut in and unapproachable.

More serious troubles may have arisen. One may have been unfaithful. There may be a serious loss of mutual trust and respect. Where love and tenderness once were, hostility and bitterness may now be the dominant emotions.

All these are signs that a marriage is in trouble. Any couple who have run into difficulties of this kind, and have failed to overcome these difficulties, know that they are in need of help.

This is the age of the expert. If the patent medicines in the bathroom cabinet can't cure your headache, you go to the doctor. If he can't cure it, you ask him to refer you to a specialist. You don't stop till you've done everything that can be done.

Why not the same with marriage? If the book says you can have it happy and harmonious, surely that's what you're entitled to. And if you can't work it out, why not call in the expert?

Applied to marriage, this is a new idea. Like all new ideas, it meets resistance at many points. The marriage relationship is a very intimate and personal one, and most of us hesitate to talk about it to outsiders. All the same, it's just good common sense to get help if by doing so you can share in more of life's satisfactions. Yes, the new idea is certainly a sound one.

It is so sound that it has been spreading quickly in recent years. The result is that a new demand has been created — a new demand for a new kind of person who is an expert on marriage: someone with special training and experience who can sit down with Tom and Nancy and help them find out just why they aren't getting the best out of marriage. The emphasis is not on saving marriages from disaster, but on making marriages as worth while as possible. It is a positive, not a negative function.

prevention is better than cure

There's another side of marriage counseling that has been emphasized, especially in this country. In the middle 1930's, Professor Ernest Groves pioneered the first modern-style college course on marriage. These courses have grown in popularity till today, when it is estimated that they are offered in nearly half of the colleges and universities of the United States. The courses began by being mainly academic. Nowadays they are mostly "functional" — tailored to the life adjustments of the students.

As students have learned about what it takes to make marriage work out successfully, they have naturally been looking at themselves and wondering if they had it. The next logical step was to go to the instructor and unburden their anxieties and doubts. This led inevitably to the question — "If I have a deficiency in my equipment for successful marriage, can I make it good ahead of time?"

In some cases at least, the chances seemed promising. So the instructor worked with the student to help him get ready for marriage and its adjustments. This idea of premarital counseling has rapidly gained ground. Ministers, feeling their special responsibility toward the couples they united in marriage, took up the idea. Some forward-looking physicians developed the premarital physical examination.

Clearly premarital counseling is closely linked to marriage counseling. It's good to be able to help people overcome their marriage troubles. It's better still to prevent those troubles from ever arising at all. It's doubtful whether this can be done in all situations. But the idea of preparation for marriage makes sense. We don't allow planes to take off till they've been checked to make sure they're air-worthy. If a check can be made to see whether people are marriage-worthy, it would seem to be a sensible idea to offer such a service.

Young people are concerned at the number of marriages that fail. They don't want theirs to go the same way. More and more of them are accepting the principle that prevention is better than

cure. They are seeking out those who can help them prepare for marriage.

More recently, the same idea has been spreading among those who have been divorced. "Why did my marriage fold up?" is a question that has a bearing not only on the past, but on the future. The conventional concept of the innocent and the guilty parties in divorce — the white sheep and the black sheep — isn't standing up under close scrutiny. We are seeing that when a marriage fails, it's usually because two people made mistakes. Either they made errors of judgment by choosing partners to whom they were unable to adjust; or they showed personal inadequacy by failing to adjust to partners who might well have been suitable for them.

Either way, they have something to correct and outgrow. Merely blaming each other doesn't help them to see where they went wrong. It doesn't help them to get ready to do better in a second marriage — and most divorced persons do remarry. It would clearly be a smart idea for a divorced person to face up to any deficiencies in himself which contributed to the breakdown of his marriage, if he wants to be more successful next time.

Moreover, if a divorce becomes inevitable, the experience may be less hurtful to children of the marriage if needless hostility and unpleasantness are avoided. Divorcing parents owe it to their children to add nothing more to the misery and conflict which they have already had to endure. One way of achieving this end is to enlist counseling aid to handle the dispersion of the family group as painlessly as possible for all concerned.

So marriage counseling is coming to include divorce counseling. There have been instances of couples who, realizing that divorce was inevitable, have worked through the divorce experience with a marriage counselor, and then continued counseling as they seek to remake their lives. If this can help them to understand themselves and others better, it can do something to redeem the mistakes of the past.

WHY MARRIAGES GO WRONG

We are going to see just how the marriage counselor works. But first we must understand clearly the situation he has to deal with.

Bill and Janet are very much in love. Marriage is their goal. The time they spend together is so satisfying that they think it will be heaven to be together all the time, to belong to each other completely.

The great day comes, and goes. At first it's as wonderful as they dreamed it would be. And then, gradually, they become aware of little discordant notes breaking into the harmony. Trifling things, really. But somehow they mount up. They even cause quarrels, and leave hurt feelings and a dull, flat feeling of disillusionment.

This is no disaster. It's the moving of the marriage out of the phase of fantasy into the phase of reality. It's ridiculous to imagine that any two people could be completely tailor-made

for each other, that they could exactly fit all the contours of each other's personalities.

So Bill and Janet learn that the ideal marriage they dreamed about isn't a free gift handed to them on a gold tray by an indulgent and smiling providence. All they start with is the raw materials out of which a good marriage has to be made. They have to do the work. They have to make their dreams come true.

Of course, if you're prepared to settle for a rather superficial exchange of basic services, on the principle of "I'll-scratch-your-back-if you'll-scratch-mine," marriage is easy enough, and very little adjusting is needed. But if what you want is a deep, rich, satisfying, and mutual relationship, with two lives open to each other and a constant flow of love, affection and tenderness between them – why, then it's going to cost you more: in patience; in sustained effort; in willingness to make sacrifices in order to attain your cherished goal.

Bill and Janet, then, have a major task on their hands. What they are asking of marriage can't be attained apart from a whole series of adjustments that may be quite difficult. At its best, marriage today is better than it has ever been. It is also harder to work out than it has ever been, because Americans are asking more of marriage than people have ever asked before.

Because the aim is so high, the task is hard. And because the task is hard, the failures are many. Some marriages, indeed, are doomed to failure from the start. The people concerned are inadequate, ill-matched, and unwilling to accept the disciplines involved.

Other couples, however, begin with all that is necessary for success. They have the right set of raw materials for the making of a good marriage. But they mishandle the materials and fall down on the job. So the design that was quite practicable is never executed.

This may sound like a judgment on these people. It isn't. Most people who go into marriage are desperately eager to succeed. Their happiness, their self-esteem, their social prestige – all these

are invested in the expectation that the marriage will work out. They put the best they've got into it. They strive to succeed.

Yet they fail where success is possible. They do so because they don't clearly understand. They don't understand themselves, their roles as husbands or wives. They don't understand their partners. They don't understand marriage and what it calls for.

how counseling can help

The only hope for these people is to get help. Left alone, their marriages usually go from bad to worse. Under the pressure of hurt feelings and disappointment, they lash out at each other, or withdraw from each other — only to create more hurt feelings and more disappointment. As they pile up the barriers between them, the chances of meeting their needs and fulfilling their hopes diminish rapidly. Yet these needs — the need to love and to be loved, to comfort and be comforted, to understand and to be understood — become all the more intense because they are so completely frustrated. It is only a matter of time before husband or wife turns away from the marriage and seeks solace in some other direction —in a new love, in a return to the security of the parental home, in absorption in children, in work, in alcohol.

Thus something that could have been good ends in disaster. It is as if a child received a building kit and tried to make a model plane, but in his ignorance and clumsiness he failed to match the parts to each other. Then, in increasing exasperation, he used force and broke them. Finally, patience exhausted and control gone, he smashed to pieces the thing he formerly cherished, leaving only a pile of tangled wreckage on the floor.

Yet with the help of a cooperative parent the child might have made the model plane, and it might have become his pride and joy. Likewise, with the help of a marriage counselor the couple might have achieved a happy and harmonious marriage.

This is not theory or idle speculation. It is a known, established fact. Not all marriages can be helped to meet expectations. But

the case files of marriage counselors are full of records of couples who, with timely help and guidance, were able to accomplish what they could never have accomplished alone.

We accept this principle without question in other areas. We call in the dentist to take care of our teeth, the physician to look after our health, the auto mechanic to service our car. But when it comes to something as personal as marriage, we hesitate.

We hesitate because we do not know just what sort of people marriage counselors are, and just how they work. Doctors, dentists, and auto mechanics are people in whom we have gained confidence because of the services they have rendered us. The marriage counselor, by contrast, is an unknown quantity. None of us can afford to take risks with our personal lives or our intimate relationships.

MEET THE MARRIAGE COUNSELOR

What sort of person, then, is a marriage counselor?

It isn't easy to fit them all into one neat and tidy group. This is a new field of service, and the needs that have arisen are being met in various ways. Almost all marriage counseling today, however, falls into three main types.

First, there are many professional people who, while they wouldn't claim to be marriage counselors in any technical sense, nevertheless recognize that dealing with conflicts between husband and wife is part of their job. This is true of physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists; of ministers, priests, and rabbis; of social workers, lawyers, and teachers. By no means all the members of these professions are qualified to do this work; yet in each group there will be found some who, as a result of special training or wide experience, or both, are able to do an excellent job in dealing with a marriage problem.

Moreover, basic training for these professions is now beginning to include some guidance in counseling and in the understanding of human relations. This is more true at present of psychiatrists

and psychologists, of the social workers and of the clergy, than of the other groups. But everywhere opportunities for this training are on the increase.

At the present time there is unfortunately no very reliable way of knowing how competent any particular professional man or woman is in the field of marriage counseling, unless, of course, he or she has taken special advanced training in the field, or has membership in some recognized professional organization (such as the American Association of Marriage Counselors).

The second type of marriage counseling is provided through an agency or organization in which several counselors work together as a team. Some of these agencies (such as the Marriage Council of Philadelphia) concentrate all their efforts in the field of marriage counseling and do nothing else. Others (like the family service agencies throughout the country) offer counseling and assistance in a wide range of personal and family difficulties. Generally known as family counselors, the staff members of these agencies are professionally qualified social workers.

The quality of the marriage counseling done by the many agencies throughout the country varies considerably. It is very difficult to set up agreed standards which all organizations are willing to accept. However, there are decided advantages in marriage counseling offered through an agency. The counselors work as a team, under supervision, and usually are able to fall back on the help of consultants from other professions when the problem is such that it needs a combination of skills. Moreover, nearly all counselors working in this way are appointed by a Board of Directors who assure the personal integrity and the professional credentials of those whose services are used by the organization. Under these circumstances the chances are good that a responsible and competent person will be employed.

The third source of marriage counseling is through men and women who set up in private practice as specialists in this field. The number of these is not very great. Because this is a new profession, still regarded with suspicion in many quarters, the

chances of making a living out of it are not good. Even those who do set up in private practice, therefore, usually combine marriage counseling with something else—psychotherapy, teaching, medical practice, writing, and the like.

There are in this group, unfortunately, a few quacks and charlatans. Though efforts are being made to require certification, there is as yet little or no machinery to prevent anyone from setting up as a marriage counselor, even if he has no credentials of any kind. A few incompetent and unqualified individuals have done this, and appear in the telephone directory along with the reputable counselors.

It is not difficult to detect these "phoney" counselors, if proper inquiries are made. Almost all well-qualified private practitioners in this field today seek membership in the American Association of Marriage Counselors or have some equally trustworthy professional affiliation. Among these are some of the best counselors who can be found.

It will be seen that, on the whole, marriage counselors are responsible and trustworthy people. Almost all of them are professionally qualified and answerable to some organization or association. The nature of this work is such that, with rare exceptions, it attracts only people whose basic motive is a desire to serve their fellow-man. It requires great patience, tolerance, and faith in people. It involves a good deal of nervous strain, because dealing with distressed and disturbed people is not relaxing. Moreover, it calls for considerable knowledge and skill.

how the counselor works

The word "counsel," according to the dictionary, means "to give advice to; to admonish." This is what most people imagine the counselor does.

However, generally accepted ideas about counseling are very wide of the mark. As a matter of fact, a well-trained modern counselor would hardly ever give advice and would under no circumstances admonish!

A simple, clear description of the counseling process is not easy to give. For that reason many people are very confused, and conjure up wildly inaccurate pictures in their minds. It is probably because of this, more than for any other reason, that people generally hesitate to seek the help of counselors.

John Smith is having trouble in his marriage. He goes to see Dr. Jones. For about ten minutes he outlines his problem to the counselor. Then for half an hour or so, Dr. Jones takes over and asks him a great many questions, which he answers to the best of his ability.

Finally the counselor sits back in his chair, clears his throat, looks very wise, and says, "Mr. Smith, your trouble is so-and-so. Now listen to me carefully. What you must do is such-and-such. Then your troubles will all be over." Whereupon Mr. Smith rises, shakes hands with Dr. Jones, goes home and carries out the instructions he has been given, and all is well. The all-seeing wisdom of the counselor came up with the magic formula which breaks the deadlock in the marriage.

That is the concept of counseling that exists in the mind of the average man or woman. What is wrong with it? The answer is that there's hardly anything about it that is right!

helping people to help themselves

The methods of different counselors vary a good deal, of course. But there are basic principles which most accept. One of these is that the counselor's job is not to tell John and Mary Smith what to do, but to help them to find their own solution to their problem. Only a solution that comes from them, out of their own thinking and feeling, is of any use. If the counselor dictated a policy to them, he would be taking over the job of running their lives, imposing his will upon theirs. This he must not do, because the work of the counselor is based upon his respect for the freedom of the individual to manage his own life in his own way, in so far as this is in accord with the welfare of others.

The counselor therefore accepts John and Mary Smith as they are. He makes no attempt to put them under pressure to do what he thinks they ought. Whatever they say, and whatever they do, he continues to respect their individuality. He knows that if he fails to do this he has forfeited the power to help them.

The aim of the counselor is to create an atmosphere in which John and Mary are free to talk about themselves, to bring out their hurt feelings, to unburden their disappointments. He may on occasion see them together, but usually he sees them separately, because if there is conflict between them they will feel freer and more relaxed out of one another's presence.

Some marriage problems can be cleared up in one interview. But that is very unusual. As a rule a series of separate interviews will be necessary with each of the marriage partners. It takes time for John and Mary to gain complete confidence in the counselor; and it takes time for the counselor to get to know John and Mary well enough to give them all the help they need.

People sometimes have a feeling of let-down when they discover that the counselor can't do everything in one interview, that he has no magic wand in his desk drawer that he can wave over them. Yet a moment's reflection will show that a problem involving the relationships between two people can be very complex. It may have taken years for the conflict between these two people to build up to the point of crisis that drove them to seek help. Is it reasonable to hope that all this can be reversed in one short hour? It is only an inexperienced counselor who promises quick results. Indeed, this is one of the best ways to distinguish a "phoney" counselor from a real one.

The counselor will, therefore, unless the problem is quite superficial, want to plan for several interviews of about an hour each. As a rule, in these interviews he will encourage the client to do most of the talking, while he himself plays the part of a responsive and encouraging listener. He knows that what troubled people need most is the chance to talk out their troubles with someone who is not only sympathetic, but who can also

help them understand the situation. Alone, what they usually do is to think and think about their problems, going round and round in circles, till they reduce themselves to a state of nervous exhaustion. The counselor's aim is to free the client from his feeling of hoplessness and despair and to get the closed circle of his thinking disentangled until he begins to move in a purposeful direction.

letting in the light

This is what John and Mary may reasonably expect from their interviews with the counselor. First they should get a feeling of relief as they get their troubles off their chests. Then as they talk with the counselor they should begin to see the issues more clearly—just as the vague forms of objects seen in the dark take on clearer shape as light flows in. This is actually a very good way of describing counseling. It is letting light in to dark places. It is always so much easier to work in the light than in the dark, because you can see what you're doing and where you're going.

As the light comes, it may reveal some aspects of John and Mary that they are not happy to see. In marriage conflicts it's very natural for husbands and wives to blame each other for all the trouble. To become aware that your own contribution to the problem was bigger than you thought it was is sometimes hard to take. Yet most of us can face truths if we have to—especially when we become aware of them through the development of our own insight.

And this is the way in which the counselor tries to work. He knows that if he tries to point out John's faults, John will instinctively go on the defensive. So the counselor prefers to encourage John to think and talk about his marriage until he becomes aware of his faults by himself.

All this takes time, but it is a very healthy process. The truth is that most of us, during the whole of our lives, hardly ever have a chance to talk about ourselves out loud in the presence of someone we can completely trust, and to whom we can be com-

pletely honest about ourselves without any fear of being judged or rejected. To experience a relationship of this kind is about the most healing process anyone can undergo. It is the task of the counselor to make this possible.

To do so, the counselor keeps strictly to the rule that everything told him must be treated as completely confidential. It sometimes surprises people to know that professional counselors do not even tell their own wives anything about their cases. The professional ethic accepted by the counselor in this regard is a very strict one, and is scrupulously honored. The counselor knows that he cannot expect people to tell him all about themselves unless they can be completely sure that it will go no further. Where the counselor quotes cases in discussions with his colleagues, or in teaching or writing, he either does so with the permission of those concerned, or alters the details so that there is virtually no possibility of identification.

the counselor as interpreter

As the counselor wins the confidence of John and Mary, and comes to understand the difficulties that have caused the trouble in their marriage, he is able to interpret their feelings to each other. This is what they greatly need. When two married people are in conflict, emotional communication breaks down between them. They can speak words to each other. But at the deeper levels they are not in tune, so only the surface meanings of their words get over. The undertones and overtones meet a solid wall of resistance and bounce back. So they are able to make no progress toward understanding and accepting each other.

The counselor can help by breaking this deadlock. When John says, "I can't understand why Mary nags me the way she does. Can you?" the counselor is ready, if John really wishes it, to put forth Mary's point of view; for the counselor has heard Mary's attempt to explain how she hates to nag, but finds herself in situations where she can't resist the urge to do so. The situations in question are caused by John's annoying habit of withdrawing into himself when Mary has something she wants him to do. John can't at this stage take this from Mary direct without feeling he is being attacked and instinctively taking the defensive. But when the counselor relays it, John is able to consider the situation more objectively, and in an atmosphere where he has no need for self-defense he can ask himself honestly whether there could be any truth in what Mary says.

In this way, by acting as an interpreter between the couple, the counselor can help the process of clearing away misconceptions. So the couple reach the point at which they are able to lay down the weapons with which they have been defending themselves and attacking one another, and are able instead to unite in a common attack upon the problems that broke down their healthful patterns of response and communication. Once they have reached this point, the deadlock has been broken, and they can continue to rebuild the marriage by themselves. The counselor has fulfilled his role and can retire from the scene.

At many points this description of what happens in marriage counseling is oversimplified. But even so, it will perhaps help to show why counseling takes time and involves the building up of a relationship of mutual confidence between the counselor and each partner separately. Through this relationship which both marriage partners share with a third person whom they trust, and with whom they can be honest, the way is opened up for healing of the broken relationship.

It would be a mistake to assume that marriage counseling always ends in the reconciliation of the partners to each other. Sometimes the development of deeper insight only leads to the conviction on the part of one or both that the relationship cannot continue. The counselor would of course make sure that John and Mary were taking fully into account every factor in the situation that was favorable to the continuation of their relationship. But beyond that, he would exert no pressure upon them to continue, if it was clear that this was contrary to the considered judgment of one or both. To put pressure upon people is against his principles as a counselor; and in any case, he knows that no solution arrived at under pressure from outside is likely to have any stability or permanence.

If therefore a break has to come, the marriage counselor must accept it, even if reluctantly. At least he and the couple know that their decision not to continue together is not the result of unexamined prejudice. If a careful and honest examination of the entire relationship with the help of a neutral and independent expert does not open up the way for its restoration, it is not likely that anything else will succeed in doing so.

how to cooperate with the counselor

A question often asked is "In what proportion of cases do marriage counselors succeed in bringing about a reconciliation?" It is hard to give an accurate reply, because the reconciliation of an estranged couple would have to be lasting in order to be judged successful. In some organized agencies the following up

of cases can be done tactfully, and may even be welcomed by the couple. However, the counselor in private practice generally follows the rule of being available to help only when his services are wanted and sought. So his policy, after a case is closed, is not to try to find out how his clients are making out.

No question about success in this work is fair, however, unless it takes into consideration the conditions under which the counselor had to work. If a surgeon had brought to him a long series of patients in an advanced stage of cancer, and was required to operate upon them, it would be a gross injustice to say that he was a bad surgeon because few of them recovered. Obviously the poor man would be given little chance to use his skill effectively.

A rather similar state of affairs is to be found in the field of marriage counseling. As a result of widespread ignorance about the nature of the counseling process, people who need help in their marriages don't know how to make the best use of the resources available to them. The counselor is unable to give them the help he wants to offer, the help they sorely need, because they don't give him a proper chance.

three conditions for success

There are three conditions in particular which go a long way toward ensuring the success of marriage counseling. If they could be guaranteed in all cases, the effectiveness of counselors would be very greatly increased.

First, *marriage problems should be brought for counseling as early as possible.* We have seen how when a marriage becomes emotionally deadlocked, the relationship begins to fall apart, often quite rapidly. When husband and wife are no longer working together, but begin to work against each other, they inflict injuries on each other which cool their affection and build up hostility and resentment in its place. Under tension tempers are lost. The couple show the worst side of themselves to one another and may become cruelly punitive in their attitudes and actions. Sometimes the things they do to each other under stress become

greater causes of conflict between them than the original disagreement that started it all!

As their living together develops into a state of warfare, the desire for reconciliation soon begins to wane. If there is no improvement, the chronic stage is reached in which they no longer have any real desire to restore the marriage, but only to get away from each other.

If the couple had come to him at the beginning, the task of the counselor would have been relatively simple. By coming later, they give him a far more difficult job to do; for he not only has to clear up the original problem, but also to repair all the damage they did to each other while they were fighting over it!

But how do the couple know when a problem in their relationship is serious enough to need counseling help?

The answer is simple. No marriage counselor wants couples to bring him their lovers' tiffs. It is healthy for married people to wrestle with their problems themselves, as long as they are making progress. But when they reach the point at which, with the utmost effort of which they are capable, they can make no further headway, that is the red light for them. When they are deadlocked, and see no way out, there is no time to be lost.

Couples usually know when they have reached this point in a conflict between them. If they are taught to be on the alert, and to act at once if this happens, the counselor is given the best chance of clearing up the cause of conflict. It is probably not too much to say that most marriage problems could be resolved, or greatly eased, if they could be brought for skilled counseling at this stage.

The second condition favorable to success in marriage counseling is that *both husband and wife should cooperate fully in the counseling process.* This is usually achieved when the problem is brought at an early stage; though not always. With the deterioration of the marriage, however, the willingness to work for a solution is often greatly reduced, until in the chronic stage one partner refuses to take any step toward reconciliation.

Seek counseling before a marriage becomes emotionally deadlocked.

It is much more difficult for the counselor to do a good job when only one partner is ready to cooperate. He hears only one side of the story, and has only half of the marriage to work on. In such circumstances the counselor will usually do his best, and hope that at some later stage the non-cooperating partner may undergo a change of heart and be willing to join in.

Even when both partners are willing to work with him, the counselor may find one more responsive than the other. He then has the difficulty of working against the resistance or scepticism of a person who is coming to see him only under duress or out of a sense of duty. Often, however, this kind of resistance breaks down as the nature of the counseling process begins to be understood. It is hard to experience good counseling and not become convinced of its value.

The third factor that will make for success is that *the couple should be willing to continue with counseling for a reasonable length of time.*

It is natural that people should be reluctant to go on spending time, money, and effort on something that has become necessary only because they have mishandled their relationships. No one blames them for wanting to get the process over and done with as soon as possible.

At the same time, the counselor wants to do his work well. It is disappointing to him when couples are content with surface patching and haven't the patience to work for a thorough overhaul of their relationship. Some couples, as soon as the immediate tension is eased and they feel a bit better, break off relations with the counselor. This may only mean that, a little further along the way, they will run into more trouble. How much better it would be to heed the warning they have had and put their whole relationship on a firmer footing.

Counseling at its best is not merely a matter of solving problems. It is a process in which growth of the personality and of the relationship aims to avoid the recurrence of that type of problem ever again. This concept of counseling, however, is as yet only very dimly grasped by the general public. So long as people think of it as a quick way of getting out of trouble in one easy step, it will have little chance to show how much more than that it can actually achieve.

Probably the greatest hope for the future of marriage counseling lies in the increasing emphasis on premarital counseling. This may seem a strange thing to say, because surely premarital counseling aims to make later marriage counseling unnecessary. That is true; and undoubtedly in many cases it will be achieved. It is unreasonable, however, to expect this in all cases. Therefore premarital counseling, while its immediate aim is obviously to help the young couple to increase their understanding of the task of marriage, should also make very clear to them exactly what marriage counseling is, and how to make intelligent use of it if the need should ever arise. To do this is probably the nearest we can go toward giving a young couple an insurance policy for their future marriage.

what does counseling cost?

A very practical question that confronts the person needing help is — "How much will it cost?"

The fees charged for marriage counseling vary very greatly. Ministers, as a rule, make no charge at all. A top-level psychiatrist may charge $30 to $50 an hour. However, the usual fee paid to a well-qualified counselor in private practice ranges between $10 and $20 an hour.

In the case of people who simply cannot pay such fees, the private counselor may make an adjustment, and the agencies which are community-supported may waive the fee. Most agencies, and some private counselors, charge fees calculated on a sliding scale in relation to income.

No counselor is likely to turn away, because of inability to pay, a person in genuine need of help. The counselor feels responsible for such a person. If he cannot take on the case himself, he will try to refer it to some source of help that is within the means of the person. It is usual to discuss the question of payment in the first interviews, and at this point the client should frankly put all his cards on the table. Counselors could never go on with this kind of work if they were not sympathetic and understanding persons; so no one need fear a rebuff because he is poor.

On the other hand, those who are at all able to pay the regular fee should make every effort to do so. It is good for one's self-respect that one should meet one's obligations and pay one's way. Moreover, if counseling is costing good money, this provides a strong incentive to cooperate fully in the process and so get full value for that money.

The fees which counselors charge are sometimes thought to be excessive. As a matter of fact, they are quite modest in relation to the costs involved. Most counselors have had to pay heavily for graduate and professional training. Most are in marriage counseling because of a sense of service, and could doubtless earn better money, with the qualifications they have, in some other field. They are certainly not exploiting the public.

counselors in your locality

If you have a marriage problem, and are inclined to seek counseling help, how should you go about it?

First you should decide which of the three kinds of available counseling, as described earlier, will best suit your needs. If you don't consider your problem to be a very serious one, you might take it first to your minister or physician and talk it over in a general way. You can decide which of the two to approach according to the nature of the problem and the degree of confidence you feel in their capacity to render this kind of help.

If this doesn't provide the solution, or if you prefer in the first place to consult a marriage counselor as such, you will have to consider whether you wish to seek help through an agency or from a private practitioner. Generally speaking, the latter will cost you more than the former.

To find out about agencies in your locality, there are several possible approaches. If you live in or near a large city, there will probably be a Community Welfare Council, or some similar coordinating body, which will have up-to-date information on all available services. This should not be difficult to locate.

In a smaller community, there is less likely to be a central organization, and you may have to do a little shopping around to find out what the possibilities are. Here are some suggestions.

First, consult your clergyman or doctor. He may be well-informed about local possibilities. If you have a college or university near, try the psychology and sociology departments. They should know the local resources. Indeed, some universities offer a counseling service which is available to the local community.

The local organizations most likely to offer, or to know about, marriage counseling services are those concerned with family service, mental health, or social hygiene. Other good possibilities are the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. One of these organizations will probably be represented somewhere in your locality.

Your decision may be to seek marriage counseling from someone in private practice. You may be able to locate such a person

A good marriage is a source
of deep and lasting fulfillment.

by following the procedures already outlined. If, however, you are completely unable to do so, you could try writing to one of the national organizations listed at the end of this pamphlet, asking for local references. The American Association of Marriage Counselors, for instance, will give you names and addresses of counselors in your district or state. Don't forget, in writing to these organizations, always to enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope for their reply.

conclusion

A good marriage is a source of deep and lasting fulfillment. Of all the things we desire, few can be of greater importance to us than happiness at home, success in the most intimate relationship of our lives.

We naturally expect, as adults, to be able to achieve these goals by our own efforts, making use of our own resources. This is good and right.

In these days, however, marriage has become more difficult than it was in the past — because, among other things, we are expecting more out of it. This means that many are failing today to make marriage work.

None of us wants to find himself in this kind of difficulty. Nevertheless, many of us will. And if we do, a great deal depends on the maturity with which we handle the situation.

If this should happen to you, don't let stubborn pride or blind prejudice prevent you from seeking skilled help. It is not smart, or intelligent, or mature to risk making havoc of your life and of the lives of others who are close to you, because you are not willing to let someone help you who has been trained for this very purpose.

Marriage counseling services are by no means, as yet, all that they should be. But they are improving and spreading rapidly. Through such services, wisely administered and wisely used, a vast amount of needless personal misery and social disintegration could be avoided.

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Be[illegible] information about marriage counseling in the United States may be sought:

American Association of Marriage Counselors, 104 East 40th Street, New York 16, New York

Central Conference of American Rabbis, Committee on Marriage, Family, and the Home, 40 West 68th Street, New York 23, N. Y.

Department of Family Life, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 257 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, New York

Family Life Bureau, National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington 5, D.C.

Family Service Association of America, 215 Fourth Avenue, New York 3, New York

National Association for Mental Health, 10 Columbus Circle, New York 19, New York

National Council on Family Relations, 1219 University Avenue, S.E., Minneapolis 14, Minnesota

Rabbinical Assembly of America, 3080 Broadway, New York 27, New York

what to read

Black, Algernon. *If I Marry Outside My Religion.* Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 204. Third printing, April 1956. 25¢

Duvall, Evelyn, *Building Your Marriage.* Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 113. Twentieth printing. September 1956. 25¢

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Pratt, Dallas, M.D. and Neher, Jack. *Mental Health is a Family Affair.* Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 155. Eleventh printing, July 1956. 25¢

Thorman, George. *Broken Homes.* Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 135. Eighth printing, August 1955. 25¢

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